

## Sanguis by Pondermoniums

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - Vampire, Anxiety, Anxiety Attacks, Billy Hargrove Has a Crush on Steve Harrington, Blood Donor Steve Harrington, Contracts, Explicit Sexual Content, Human/Vampire Relationship, M/M, Master/Servant, Other Additional Tags to Be Added, Possessive Behavior, Protective Billy Hargrove, Protective Steve Harrington, Queer slur and usage, Repaying Debt, Slow Burn, Sort Of, Vampire Billy Hargrove, Vampire Bites

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Steve Harrington's Parents

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2021-07-20

**Updated:** 2022-01-20

**Packaged:** 2022-03-31 10:29:39

**Rating:** Explicit

**Warnings:** Graphic Depictions Of Violence

**Chapters:** 5

**Words:** 8,373

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Steve believes vampires and humans live in a peaceful, cohabiting society.

Until Harrington Senior gets himself and the family into a debt that he has no way out of. Then Steve learns that their family is descended from a long history of serving vampires as blood donors.

And his father has just sold him to the highest bidder.

# 1. Debt

## Author's Note:

- For [Carerra\\_os](#).

This is massively inspired by [carerra\\_os](#) / [@ghostofjellyfishforgotten](#) on tumblr! I posted about a blood donor / vampire relationship and their tags were just \*chef's kiss\*

[Read the post here ~](#)

Steve didn't judge people who worked as donors—

Fine, as an adult with a better awareness and compassion, Steve didn't judge donors. He might've said some shitty things to Jonathan Byers when he worked to make his family extra money.

Honestly? Steve admired that. Jonathan being underage and having the guts to figure out how to get into the donation clinic, and then to let...

Steve knew he was a coward in a lot of ways. He knew it when he called Jonathan a queer who enjoyed leeches sucking on him. He knew it when he lost to the punches Byers threw. For a skinny, half empty blood bag, the guy could really *hit*. And Steve knew it when he almost ran away from Nancy and Jonathan fighting off the rogue vampire who kidnapped little Will Byers.

But Steve didn't run away.

Just like he didn't run away from the couch he sat on with his mother while his father explained...a situation that left Steve digging deeper and deeper into the gap between fear and bravery. Maybe call it disassociation. Or confused shock.

"You what?"

Harrington senior never took well to being interrupted. But he sighed from across the coffee table and reiterated, “The family is in debt.”

“No. You. You’re in debt. This is your problem.”

The man certainly didn’t take well to having his own mistakes shoved under his nose. “This isn’t for debate. This is the way things are and need to be.”

“No,” Steve repeated like a broken record clinging onto its song. “This is your fault. Who’s made me work minimum wage jobs to *teach me a lesson*? Who’s refused to pay for me to go to community college? Who hasn’t let me work in their company? And who made the shitty gambles with your company’s stocks? You shoved me out, so it’s definitely not my problem—”

*“The contract has already been signed.”*

Now his mother shifted her posture on the couch beside him. “Excuse me?”

Steve’s father moved his blunt nails over the armrest of his wingback, fidgeting. At least *something* put fear into the old bastard’s heart.

“There’s nothing I could do. The market has been evolving ever since *vampires* gained their rights and opened up their decades and centuries old bonds—”

“Vampire legislation passed over a century ago,” Mrs. Harrington purred. Sometimes the worst anger was the quiet kind. “You have no excuse. You lost the game, and you *sold our son*. Is that what we’re to believe?”

“That’s not possible,” Steve intercepted. “Slavery isn’t a thing anymore. Even I picked that up in history. And I would have to be there to sign the contract! It’s my—”

“Steve,” his father silenced. “When enough money is involved, anything is bought. And you’re not like anyone else.”

Mrs. Harrington fumed, “Do not talk to him like he’s a prize pony!”

“Except to a wealthy vampire, he *is*.”

Steve could only sit in weighted silence for a moment. He always joked to himself that he'd be disowned one of these days. For being a disappointment. For all of his bad grades. For giving his friends alcohol and cigarettes. For only being able to get jobs that required no qualifications or experience level at all. For discovering he liked kissing boys at the grimy music venues Robin took him to. Maybe living at home for too long. Or leaving the smell of burnt pancakes in the air too often because he always struggled with the first one—

“Vampire?” he croaked. For some reason it hadn't dawned to him until now but...shit.

Holy shit.

Steve wasn't being sold off to be some billionaire's secretary for life. He was being...truly *sold*. Like...goodbye, Steve, who likes spring nights and summer mornings. His favorite food is breakfast and he wishes he kept with the music lessons his mom paid for instead of being peer pressured into sports. Whose best friend was Robin Buckley because she was brave and funny and stuck with him during his ironic and a little bit terrifying queer awakening...

Hello, Donor 0235. Blood type O. Allergic to nickel and checks off all vaccination requirements.

“Steve's not wrong,” his mother echoed like a voice deep in a cave, drawing Steve out of his thoughts. “He is the one to sign the contract. Not you.”

“He is still classified as our dependent and on our insurance,” his father refused.

“So being an adult means nothing in this country?”

“They have our family records, Annette!” he exclaimed. “There is a dual government in this country even if nobody below upper-middle class sees it. The human government had to cede a great deal because the vampire population is massive. And they've kept track of all the *Sanguis* families! Name changes, and two World Wars did nothing to

save us—”

“The what?” Steve all but whispered.

His mother rotated her hips to face him. “We only have legends about how it happened. Paleolithic gods making deals, vampires crossbreeding humans to make a certain kind of blood donor, human evolution after symbiotic deals were struck—but that doesn’t matter. The point is that there are people in this world with abilities that preserve themselves against vampires. That’s why you healed in less than two days after that silly fight by the movie theatre.”

His father intercepted, “The genes skipped your mother but fell to you.”

Steve’s eyes widened as his mother confirmed, “To protect us, girls have been promoted in the family tree for generations. Through marriage, their names could change, and make them harder to track.”

Steve countered toward his father, “So this *really* isn’t your place to sign my life away. Like five times over.”

“I quite agree,” his mother turned back to the man she’d married. The man who was supposed to protect her and her children with his name and promising, growing business.

At least Steve wasn’t the only failure in the family.

His father massaged his forehead and defended, “As I said. Humans’ government is far easier to corrupt our way into forgiving any debt. The vampires, however, are inconsolable. The bastard would have my business, the cars, our house, and taken his time discovering Steve on his own if I hadn’t—”

Steve took after his father, but he was his mother’s son as they both stood up from the couch, furious that this man had thrown his own kid under a vampire’s bus—

“Get out of the house, Steve.”

His head whipped around at her. “I-What?”

*"Get out of the house,"* she seethed, but not at him. "I don't care where or what you do. Go."

Steve didn't need to be told twice but he hadn't managed to grab his car keys or his shoes before the house and his ribcage trembled with his parents' arguing. He went in his socks outside and put the shoes on in his car.

Then...he didn't know where to go. Running the hell away seemed like the obvious solution, but if vampires really had such a network, what was the point? And if he left, what would happen to his mom?

Steve drove on autopilot to the video rental store. Robin. All he had was Robin, who took the lollipop out of her mouth when the bell on the door twittered. "Hey, dingus, it's your day off—Steve?"

He couldn't really remember driving. That probably should have raised more red flags than he already had, but for now, the black and neon carpeting of the Family Video was blurring and swirling...

"I'm gonna throw up," he heard himself say.

And Robin in that distant, echoing cave his mother had spoken from, "Outside! STEVE!"

## 2. Deeds

### Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you SO MUCH for your reception over this fic!

👤 Having people as excited as I am over vampire shenanigans is the greatest support/enabling I could ask for haha 🍷

Steve didn't throw up. That was something. He only passed out in Robin's arms and woke up on her lap, somehow on the pavement outside Family Video. He groaned as he scrubbed a hand over his face, easing his way up to sitting.

"How did you drive here?" she said without preamble.

That hand on his face angled up and down in the air before going back to rubbing his eyes. "Pedals."

She snorted delicately but rubbed between his shoulder blades. That was nice. A little friction to help him stay rooted in the light of day. "Drink this."

He glanced at the green ginger ale can: one of the stingy half-cans from the break room. His hands struggled to get their strength back, but he managed to crack it open and sip carefully. Then he settled on his knees with the cold can pressed against his forehead.

"I don't know if I'll have a job here anymore."

He could hear her frown in her tone. "What? You're not leaving me here with those trash fires who only use the adult section."

Steve told her. Goodness knows Robin could keep a secret better than anyone, but she'd also taken the hit for the team and made out with him in order to get an overbearing guy off his back at their latest music excursion.

Steve didn't know if he'd have Robin much longer, either.

Instead of saying something like, *Wow, that's fucked*, she processed

quietly for a while. When she did speak, it was, “Have you met him yet?”

“I don’t *want* to meet him,” he refuted. “Some asshole who’s gotta be a hundred years older than me?”

“Do you know for sure it’s a ‘he’?”

That gave Steve pause. It took a moment for him to remember the conversation with his parents. “I think so. Dad said he. Unless *he* is just buying me to pass me off elsewhere.”

Robin hummed as she leaned forward onto her knees too. “I wonder if you could get a look at that contract.”

Steve could only sigh. “I’m not smart enough to read legal documents like that. And why would he give me a copy of my own deed?”

She grimaced slightly at that. “Surely you’re not literally *owned* by this person? It’s got to be a business arrangement. Uh—okay maybe indentured servitude, but—”

“I don’t know what that means,” he whined breathily. Defeated.

Robin looked at him, quietly bumping her knee against his. “We don’t know enough yet. But if all else fails—I don’t know—Dustin, Erica, and I can find you a way out. It’s not the first shitty situation we’ve dealt with, right?”

Steve had to snort a little. “The engineer, the lawyer, and the lesbian. Go team.”

“Should we go now?”

Steve blinked vacantly before turning to face her. “What?”

Robin gazed through the parking lot, the street, and the treetops beyond. “What are vampires like in Mexico? I guess Canada’s closer, but it gets cold as shit there.”

*We.*



Steve's eyes went soft on her. He set the can down, unable to put more in his stomach. "I'd love to. But I'm like this because of my mom. I can't leave her behind."

She hummed again, understanding. Then she sassed, "This is why the vampires and capitalists get away with it. Lack of morals."

He sighed and worked his way to his feet, if nothing else than to test his equilibrium. "Yeah, well. You and Erica can put flowers over my chivalrous ass when he's done with me."

Robin stood too. "Don't say that. We don't know enough, yet—"

"Harrington!"

Keith swung through the glass door and tried to look imposing with a hand on a cocked hip. "You gonna do overtime for wasting employee business hours or what?"

Robin's eyes rolled. "Go pop a zit and relax."

Steve gestured while he said, "It's okay. I'd rather be here than go home. My vest is in my car."

Soon matching Robin and Keith in the green, uniform vest, Steve went inside for perhaps his last day in a job he couldn't believe he'd miss. He liked when the movie theatre employees stopped by and commiserated with them on overpriced candy, talked graphic design for movie posters, and—even though Steve didn't really follow—the literary dissection of movies was nice background noise. He learned more than he ever thought he would in a freaking *Family Video*, but it wasn't so bad.

Kids being excited for new anime movie releases.

Preteens and teenagers blushing or jibing at the adult section.

Moms chewing their lips over the candy selection, like they'd probably done since they were teens.

Not to mention that they got to choose what movies played on the televisions mounted to the ceiling corners. Steve had been subjected

to more of Robin's taste than he ever needed, but had to admit that she knew some good ones.

But at the end of the day, he still had to go home.

"Do you want me to come with you? Or you can stay at my place," Robin offered.

His keys jingled in his hands while they stood at their separate cars. "I might take you up on that later. For now, I should get home. Maybe my mom's got some sort of plan."

Robin retreated into her car with a final, "Don't be brave if it's going to be counter-productive."

Steve lingered in his car for a few minutes longer. He really wished he could just drive out of town to spend the night dancing in a sweaty group of people before camping in some farmer's field with Robin's tent.

Maybe he'd just drive by his house. Get the lay of the land, and if something felt wrong, he'd keep driving. Spend the night in his car after crying his damn eyes out under the stars.

So he went home.

And...a car he'd never seen sat in his driveway. Perhaps the outdated, blue Camaro was what encouraged him to park on his curb. That couldn't be a vamp's car...could it? A shithead with enough money to *buy people* would have a chauffeured luxury car. Right? Right.

Steve strode over the grass, fragrant from baking in the sun all day and finally cooling off with the orange evening. He peeked inside the car on his way past. Nothing extraordinary. Nothing distinguishing it from a regular human's car.

No bodyguards of any kind met him inside his house. He called out, "Mom?"

He shrugged out of his vest as he heard familiar footsteps arriving to the foyer. His mom rounded the corner and—hugged him. They... weren't much of a hugging household. Feeling her soft yet bony body

was foreign and familiar at the same time.

“Come to the dining room.”

Steve sighed, now wishing he'd taken Robin up on her offer. He hung his vest on the coat hooks and left his keys in his jeans pocket. When he turned past the living room and kitchen, he tried to keep his curious frown to a minimum when he saw the figure sitting at their table. A black blazer hung off the back of his chair but his expensive, powder blue shirt hung loosely buttoned around his broad shoulders, allowing Steve to see the juncture of his throat and chest when he stood up. He saw a small glint of gold hanging there, matching the dark blond hair...like browned butter or caramel. Brown at the roots, and shining bronze where the light dripped through it.

Steve couldn't decide if he liked this guy's mullet or not. Granted, Steve had worn something similar for a time, but he'd gotten the back trimmed up for the summer. The video store's AC broke too often to have hair on his nape. Either way, the dark brows and lashes made Steve wonder how real that hair was—

“Steve, this is William Hargrove.”

“Billy,” he spoke for himself while extending a hand. Soft, low voice. But a young voice; close to Steve's age.

His eyes caught on the pair of rings on that hand as he met the handshake halfway. Billy's other hand lifted to enclose Steve's in an intimate grasp.

The long day caught up with Steve, though, as his eyes moved between this guy and his mother. “Okay,” he uttered bluntly.

“The vampire, Steve,” his mother returned in the same tone.

His arm went slack in between Billy's hands. Okay, so he'd never been this close to a vampire before—one whose head he wasn't trying to bat a homerun with, at least. Which. Well. Made Steve wonder how many vamps there actually were, and he'd just never noticed. This didn't reassure him as much he wanted it to. Mostly just shoveled an extra bit of dirt out of the pit in which he already sat.

“Okay,” he repeated, though weaker this time.

The vampire let his hand slip out of his own. He glanced at Mrs. Harrington as he shifted to move around Steve. “I’ll have a cigarette.”

His meaning was plain enough: give Steve the time to get filled in and speak with more vocabulary than *okay*. But Steve could feel the man moving around him like a heat source—

Heat? Weren’t vampires supposed to be...well. Maybe they didn’t like the terminology of *dead* if they were walking and talking.

Mrs. Harrington waited for Billy to close the front door. “He’s not what I expected.”

Steve huffed, “You can say that. *Why is he here?*”

She leaned a hip against the table, and Steve now noticed a decent stack of papers on the table as she reached for them. “Securing his investment. Hargrove’s offered a new contract.”

Steve felt his head spin as he immediately understood what was going on. “You’re *taking* it?”

“Signing this contract renders the one your father signed null and void, but only if you sign it. So there is that catch. But I’ve been going through this one. Its terms are reasonable.”

Steve felt like throwing up and sprinting around the block all at once. “Whatever happened to not being a show pony? What about decades of hiding spent to *protect me*? What about this guy being an entitled dickhead? Mom!”

“Steve—”

“What am I worth?” He mirrored her stance with a hand on the table.

“There’s not any exchange of money, unless you count the three million your father burned—”

“Three million,” Steve barked before he got caught on his own words. Three million wasn’t half bad—but he had a *point* to make. “We had

*three million?* That cheapskate really didn't want to pay for community coll—Never mind!”

“I know this is a lot,” his mother tried to soothe, but he just couldn't believe she had changed her tone so much since this morning.

“What did he say? What could he possibly say that would make you agree with sending me away?”

“You're *not* being sent away. He lives in the new development on the other side of town.”

Steve's hand flew around on his other side before slapping back on his hip. “Great! So?”

She inhaled long and slow through her nose, gathering patience while she flipped to various sections of the contract, marked by neon sticky notes. “Point and simple: you would be under his care with minimal obligation. You keep your car, your clothes, and whatever you bring with you. Your property is still your own, even while you live under his roof. You may visit here anytime you want unless it conflicts with your obligations to him—”

“He can just say everything is *obliged* to him.”

“Mr. Hargrove generously supplied a copy of your father's contract as well as this one for my safekeeping.”

Steve paused at that. “He did?”

“Yes. Menial, though it is, it's a notion of goodwill in all of this.”

Steve tried to understand. He really did. “So you can keep a copy of my deed and that makes everything okay?”

“It's not a deed, Steve. There are, in fact, clauses in here that involve your arrangement being dissolved.”

“What, like death? I have to be in a hospital bed for him to get a different meal?”

The vampire answered himself, “Like marriage.”

Matching Harrington heads rotated to Billy leaning on the wall. Steve mentally noted for later, *Jeez, he moves quiet.*

Billy continued while rotating the rings on his fingers. “I saw your work vest. You’ll get to keep using it, but I’ll need to know your schedule.”

A hot wave of—he didn’t want to label it, it was too good to be true—*relief* slicked over Steve’s ribs. “I can keep my job?”

Billy looked elsewhere like he needed a second to fathom Steve’s audacity to think so lowly of him. “Yeah? It’s not in my way at all.”

Steve went back to slouching. “Right. It’s all about you.”

He could hear the bastard’s smile behind him. “ ‘Course it is, but there’s a whole chapter in there about your health. I guarantee my insurance is better than anything you’ve ever had.”

“Will I be needing it?” he growled, slowly looking back at him.

“You might. I’ve had a look at your health records. You seem to break your nose a lot.”

Steve’s eyes widened just a millisecond, earning a grin just as swiftly. Not a soul in Hawkins knew Steve Harrington had a nose job apart from Robin and his mother—he really should have picked up on the fast healing thing sooner, because the doctors said it would take twenty to twenty-three months to be fully healed. Steve took two weeks.

“This is bullshit,” he all but shouted at his mother.

“I agree,” she countered. “But here we are.”

Billy intercepted, “As I’ve said many times: these partnerships require mental evaluations. Against all odds...I passed.”

Steve glared at the smug glint in his stupid eyes that matched his stupid shirt. *A flair for drama. Great.*

“It’s included in the contract—”

“Who grants you that?” Steve retorted. “Vampy doctors? Some committee humans don’t know about? Or are you making it up?”

The smirk dimmed. Just a little. “That’s more complicated. All you need to worry about, is being punctual to your work. It wouldn’t hurt to trim down your expectations of me tearing your throat out. It doesn’t make sense for me to injure my food source. It makes all the sense in the world to make sure my food source is provided for and happy.”

Steve muttered under his breath. “Yeah, because happiness is a contract.”

“So is marriage,” Billy chimed, which made Steve wonder what exactly this guy’s range of hearing might be. “Which leads us full circle. But dissolving our arrangement through a marriage contract is something I think you’re very far away from.”

Steve’s shoulders lifted to stand up straight. “First of all, it’s messed up that you know that. Second, I’m being punished for being single now?”

Billy rocked gently from side to side, looking far too content. “It was a guess. You get good at that when you live long enough. Sounds like you’ve been single for a long time.”

He stood up off the wall and handled his car keys in his hands. “You have my address. Bring the papers tomorrow evening. I’m up as early as five.”

Five. Five in the afternoon.

And then he just left. Left without a worry or concern whether Steve would sign this goddamn—

“Steve.”

The front door shut in the distance as he looked at his mother. “I’m sorry. But this is as good as it’s going to get.”

**Notes for the Chapter:**

The absolute audacity of this mMaAnN walking in here, looking straight out of an 80s music video, and telling Steve that he's going to take better care of him than a wife.

"If anybody can do better than me, enough to marry, fine. Checkmate."



### 3. Late

#### Notes for the Chapter:

Happy Friday, everyone!

Steve didn't have dinner. He sat with his mother as she more thoroughly went through the contract.

He didn't sign it.

Not yet.

First he had a royal meltdown in his mother's arms. With every page, every rule locked into his life, and every freedom bestowed like a *gift*, his chest just felt more and more compressed. Steve didn't really consider himself a World's Finest, gold star sort of human, but he sure as hell would like to know the exact moment he deserved *this*.

He slouched and slouched until he put his head down on his crossed arms like a kid in time out, and just...wept. The last time he felt like this, he'd been given the Scoops Ahoy uniform. He felt caged, thrown aside by his father then too, and left with the ball and chains of his own making. Not being good enough. Didn't have the school grades. Didn't even have the motivation to be something because he'd taken too long to figure himself out.

He didn't get the time. Corporate policy and sling the mesmerized menu.

The greatest surprise was Robin sitting in the cage beside him. She gave him time.

*Maybe Robin will marry me*, he thought without a shred of hope. He couldn't put her through that. With all the legal jargon stuffing his brain like cotton, there was probably a clause in there somewhere about having to, like, taste a certain way. Like Billy Hargrove would have to taste Steve's lust and love for Robin before he dissolved the contract.

Steve didn't know if vampires could taste such things. He didn't know

anything, but he didn't think he'd find another friend in this cage.

"How many...like me does he have?" he sobbed. "Am I a collector's item?"

"Even if he does have others," his mother soothed, rubbing his back, "that gives you more time to be elsewhere. Try and think of it as a part time job. He sleeps during the day. The sunlight is yours, and you're guaranteed eight hours to yourself at night."

"Yeah, to sleep. How am I supposed to date someone enough to get married?"

"You have a substantial salary—"

"I have an *allowance*, mom."

"*Use it* to go to college. Meet people. Make your time worth it."

Steve couldn't say when the last time he fell asleep in his mother's bed was. Not since he was a tiny kid, surely, but she let him into her room after he proved inconsolable. Steve slept like a rock for little more than an hour, and woke up far too early.

He spent the day at Robin's. She gave him cucumbers for his eyes. And she went with him and Mrs. Harrington to the newly developed side of town.

Western Hawkins was barely even Hawkins, technically, and the hilly land made for equal measure of horse pastures and woodsy neighborhoods. Every hill got a house and every house got a hill. Billy Hargrove's sat in view of the others', but far enough away to warrant a private backyard and just...privacy. Lots of privacy.

Steve and his mother's vehicles climbed the driveway that curled behind the house. Robin scrutinized the house from the BMW's front seat. "For a guy allergic to sunlight, he sure likes windows."

Sure enough, they could see into the living room and its balcony on the second floor. On the side of the house seemed to be some room with a corner made of windows, and slanted skylights littered the roof.

"I don't know how allergic he is, if he's getting up at 5pm in June," Steve commented.

The man himself opened the backdoor of the house and looked between their two cars. "This it?"

Steve frowned at him. "What?"

Billy nodded at the singular suitcase standing beside him. "That's all you're bringing?"

Steve didn't want to dignify that with an answer. Thankfully, his mother supplied, "For now. We haven't exactly had the time to see the place, let alone arrange a moving truck."

Billy listened while pressing a small remote in his hand. The garage door beside him began to open, displaying the Camaro sitting tranquilly—

All heads turned to the sudden arrival of a bicycle swerving with comfortable practice into the garage. The redhead on it lifted a brow at them, the slap of her Converse on the concrete the only indication of her surprise. "What's going on?"

"You know what's going on. He just brought an entourage," Billy responded.

Steve felt Robin ease her weight into him, gently nudging at the sight of the—Fourteen? Fifteen?—teenager taking her skateboard off the rack above the rear tire, and lifting the bike onto mounted wall hooks.

"Dinner's in the fridge."

Fiery hair swung over her shoulder when she turned to face him. "Why isn't it in the oven?"

"Because you're late."

"Hold on," Steve interjected, stepping forward. "Am I feeding *two* people?"

The girl's nose wrinkled. "Ew. We're not related."

Billy's eyes had taken on their half-lidded bored, annoyed, and cocky expression. "Stepsister."

Steve frowned. "How do you have a stepsister if—oh—ew."

Billy shrugged. "Dad married young. Again. Then I got custody. I think that's enough for now."

"My name's Max," his sister drawled like no, that clearly was not enough.

"Steve," he waved halfheartedly. "That's Robin. My mom, Annette."

Max just nodded and, "Okay," went inside the house.

Steve rocked a little with Robin arriving beside him and setting her elbow on his shoulder. "I think you two will get along great."

Billy's eyes slowly left the two of them as he pointed to the other side of the car. "That elevator will take your things up."

Robin whispered, "He has an elevator."

"I just said that."

All at once, Robin bounced through the garage to follow him into the house. "What is your scope of hearing, anyway?"

Billy peered at her like he had a great deal of legal obligation to be docile. "Wider than yours."

"I like a man of few words," she chimed.

"Are you going to be a problem?"

"Absolutely."

Their voices faded as they ascended into the house, leaving Steve to roll his suitcase toward the elevator—

An arm encompassed Steve's waist. He looked at his mom as she gave

him a squeeze. She held the folder with the contract pinned between her arm and body. “Let’s go, baby.”

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I'm sorry this is so short! I just really like this bundle of events and contrasting emotional standpoint between the start and finish of it ~ Plus Max deserves to have her own moment.

## 4. Rituals

Robin did what any sensible person does in a new bedroom: she starfished facedown on the bed. Steve's luggage rolled across the hardwood floor of his new room—which turned out to be the corner room on the house with all the windows.

"Not bad," she mumbled through the white, down comforter. Steve could only peer around the room, appearing very out of his element. The room looked like a ballet studio or something: light wooded floors, a whole corner of glass overlooking forestry and hills, white bedding, and the typical light beige walls all new homes had.

"You can renovate."

Steve tried to keep his stomach from floating as he glanced at his new boss and housemate leaning against the doorjamb. Billy continued, "Max has been going to town on her room. There's paint left over if you want to look at it, or buy your own."

Steve didn't really like the idea of staying here long enough to customize the room. He just wanted his nerves to settle and to sleep for a year. Robin moved out of the way for his mother to lift the suitcase onto the bed—

"What do you eat?"

Steve blinked at him, trying to focus. "What?"

Billy watched him closely but feigned nonchalant well. "You and Max need to talk groceries. Just take her with you when you shop. Don't let her fill the cart with cereal and frozen lasagnas, though."

Mrs. Harrington conversed, "Steve knows how to cook."

"As do I," Billy leaned forward with his words, turning on charm like a weird personality switch. "But I forget nutritional needs."

Robin provided, "Put colorful foods on a plate, and you're good."

Billy lifted himself off the doorjamb and sighed, "I have three boxes

of Fruit Loops in my pantry. I don't think that rule works."

Steve wondered just how much this guy was on his best behavior. Max seemed comfortable enough with him to talk back, but he didn't know what rules applied to the food source.

Unfortunately, he could not put his life on pause or rewind. Robin and his mother moved him in as best they could, and after he waved goodbye from the driveway, he faced Max, who offered with every bit of sisterly indifference, "You want a tour?"

Steve frowned. "Where did our keeper go?"

She huffed a laugh through her nose, a smile breaking through her stoic composure as she rotated to lead him through the house. "I stopped asking a while ago. Not that he does anything bad, he's just more of a gross boy than you'd expect an old ass vampire to be. His room's over there, on the dark side of the house, obviously."

It was easy for her to give a tour; everything fed into the spacious living room and its overhead balcony. Billy's room stood on the opposite end compared to Steve's, and while Steve looked out over the rear of the house, Max saw the front. Plenty of room to coexist without actually seeing much of one another. Although, the living room was an open floor plan with the kitchen, so Steve expected to interact with Max regularly.

Maybe it was Steve's charisma with teenagers and his friendship with Dustin, but Max proved easy to get along with. She helped him order some delivery dinner, since Steve's nerves were far too fried to cook, and showed him where the extra paints were to start renovating his room.

Despite the sun going down, Steve didn't see Billy again. Max kept her room open, so Steve heard her movie and music playing down the hall while he painted swatches right onto the drywall of his room.

Admittedly, after a lifetime in a wallpapered bedroom, there was something liberating about just taking random paint and slathering it onto the walls. Literally putting his mark on the room helped make it feel *his*. He even resolved to paint the baseboards white since there

was enough in the can for it. In Max's words, "We accidentally got the glossy kind. It's fine for small stuff but it's like a mirror on an entire wall, bouncing light all over the place. Billy hates it."

Steve thought it looked clean. So he let his mind go dormant as he worked without painters' tape, carefully coating the doorjamb, windowsills, and baseboards. Like some sort of home warming ritual, it helped soothe his nerves of the foreign and the strange. Hell, maybe tomorrow he'd pick up a candle. Really fill the place up with his aura—and maybe piss off a vampire nose at the same time. Good riddance.

*Just painting the bars of my cell*, he thought distantly, trying to keep his mind pointed in the good parts of this:

He could customize his room.

Max was just a kid and a decent one, from the first impressions.

Steve had work with Robin to look forward to.

At some point, money should be showing up in his bank account, so he had that to look forward—

He probably wouldn't get paid until after his first feeding. That made Steve drop the paintbrush in the sink his en suite bathroom. He hadn't seen Billy all evening. The waiting and wondering weren't doing him any favors.

So he got in the shower. One last ritual for the day, as well as another bag unpacked. The bathroom looked like his, with his towels and products everywhere. A person judging him by his bathroom would call him a material man, but they wouldn't be wrong. And Steve's materials were now his lifelines to normal and regular. No one could say he didn't take care of himself, at least.

His mother had been kind enough to remake the bed with his own sheets and pillowcases. He crawled under all of the plush nesting materials and sank into his favorite position: on his stomach with a pillow beneath his head and torso.

He didn't mean to fall asleep so fast. He hadn't even turned the lights



off. Over twenty-four hours of stress, packing, and painting had done him in, though.

Perhaps the flimsy peace of mind that he might have the first day to himself is what woke him up. Or the lights he left on. Or the turning of dry, raspy pages...

He blinked in the changed lighting. He'd left the overhead, room lights on, hadn't he? Why was the bedside lamp on? Brighter than the damn sun compared to the dim room—

Billy sat against the headboard, his head turning when he heard Steve's heart kick into a sprint. With a soft smirk, he greeted, "Your door was wide open."

He uncrossed his legs and re-crossed them in the other direction while Steve inhaled deeply and scrubbed his hair off his face. His neck ached from lying so long in one position, inducing him to flop onto his back.

Another page turned. Steve peered at the man sitting on his bed like it was nothing. Reading. "Are you waiting for me?"

"Yep."

Steve sighed heavily, all of his breathing sounds giving away just how deeply asleep he'd been. "How do we do this?"

"It's barely past midnight. We have time."

"I'm tired of wondering."

It was Billy's turn to look at him in the lamplight. "You're as transparent as ever."

"Is that a problem?"

"No. I prefer honesty or silence."

Steve did not have the brainpower to analyze that right now. He held a hand over his still-adjusting eyes while he asked, "Why didn't you wake me up?"

“Sleep cleanses the blood.”

Steve lay frozen and quiet on the bed.

Billy added, “You asked.”

“You really could have lied on my behalf.”

He chuckled and merely said, “You haven’t don’t this before.”

“So?” Steve snapped, feeling oddly insulted.

Billy tilted his head, side-eyeing him until he ordered blandly, “Sit up.”

Steve did, and frowned at the pillows Billy piled up for him to sit comfortably against. It was then that Steve realized a small cart stood on Billy’s side of the bed. Steve knew medical equipment when he saw it—

“Are you afraid of needles?”

“Only big ones,” he replied.

Billy smiled. He had the type of blue eyes that looked like water, which diffused in dim lighting to make his pupils look bigger and glassy.

All at once, Steve realized what was happening and blurted, “You just fill up blood bags?”

“As I said: you’ve never done this before.”

“Don’t bullshit me. Just answer the question. It’s my body—”

“You’re mouthy when you’re uncomfortable,” Billy critiqued, appearing equally amused and annoyed. “That’s why I let you sleep, so I wouldn’t have to taste it.”

Steve’s jaw promptly clenched while Billy unwrapped sterile parts and moved a portable pump to sit between them. A rubber tube tied around the artery in his bicep. The rip of a sachet packet, and Steve

smelled the alcohol of the wet wipe.

“Elbow, dear.”

Steve made a rough, “Pfft,” sound but turned his head away even as he pivoted the trench of his elbow to the man.

Vampire.

Whatever.

Once his skin was cold and sanitized, Steve couldn't help but rotate his head, watching the butterfly needle break through his skin with the same sound as peach flesh breaking. Between the machine and the rubber tubing unwinding, Steve watched *crimson* flow into a bag.

It...didn't quite seem real. That all *that* was *his*. He didn't feel it leaving him; like the soul was some kind of liquid that he had to preserve.

“I'm taking four bags,” Billy narrated as he sealed the first and attached the second bag.

Steve looked at him, and didn't see any lascivious hunger like a stereotypical vampire is supposed to have. Always hungry. Never satisfied. Billy looked bored. “That's a lot? That's a lot.”

“A lot for a regular person, maybe. You won't feel it missing. You'll sleep sounder, but that's it.”

Steve swallowed as the second bag filled remarkably fast. “Four bags every night?”

Billy met his gaze, and for a second, Steve thought he'd say yes just to challenge him. Instead, Billy informed, “Just to stock up now, while you're getting settled.”

That...both did and *didn't* answer Steve's question. But as the third bag started to fill, Steve began to move his fingers and flex his hand. By the time the fourth bag filled, he could feel the pump taking it out of him. Like his veins were suctioning closed, threatening emptiness.

But they gave. The bags filled, and Billy managed everything like—  
“You’ve done this before.”

Those eyes found his, looking somewhat taken off guard. “I’ve worked as a nurse before.”

“Are you licensed?”

“Twice.”

“Actual licenses?” Steve pressed, earning a smile and soft laughter.

“We can’t all prowls the nightclubs, pretty boy.”

That shut his trap all over again, making him distracted until Billy slipped a cotton pad and medical tape over his elbow—

Steve could only watch as he leaned down while lifting Steve’s arm up, and kissed the homemade band aid. Dumbstruck, confused, and brain rolling underneath the feeling of *warm lips* pressing over that thin fabric, tape, and a little on his own skin.

To Billy’s credit, he kept his charm full tilt despite whatever Steve’s face was doing. “Thanks for the meal.”

“That’s not a nurse thing,” Steve blurted, sounding immature in his own ears.

Billy sent the cart rolling through the door ahead of him while he sassed, “Oh. Are you licensed?”

He peeked over his shoulder at Steve still gaping like a fish. “Guess you don’t tell me what to do, then.”

He was already out the door when Steve belatedly sputtered, “I’ll fucking try!”

Steve could hear that asshole laugh all the way back to his room.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

\*wiggles fingers like a goblin in the shadows\* Nurse

Billy. Nurse Billy.

Meanwhile, Billy's like ".....Steve, do you know how hospitals work?" lol but don't worry, there's a reason their mouths aren't all over each other. Yet.

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## 5. Rules

### Notes for the Chapter:

This might totally fluff up the pacing and suspense but I want a Billy POV chapter.

Billy rolled the cart all the way to his room. He had to clean the pump components, and the scent of blood should stay in here.

Sometimes he loathed it all. The biohazard box for the needles and bags. The small, but still wasted, drops that slip down the drain, chased by bleach.

Ironic, how humans considered blood unhygienic. Dangerous. The way a human doctor would refuse to work on a bleeding patient if denied gloves. The way humans still considered themselves above those like himself. Those who fed on the toxins and the life force alike.

To be fair, humans are fragile. They did succumb to disease and infection from something as easy as the wrong blood on a paper cut.

To be unfair, vampire medicine had advanced humans' a millennia ago. Billy certainly wasn't old enough to have been there. But he could take sides in all the theories as to how vampires and humans cohabitated. Humans are just now dabbling in molecular engineering; why wouldn't the vampires have engineered an ideal blood cell and given it to humans ages ago?

The perfect food source. Peace for vampires. Health for humans.

*We can't have nice things*, he thought to himself, both bitter and amused. There had been some kind of war, as legendary and possibly fictitious, possibly real, as Troy. And like the losers, vampires crawled out of the very cities they built. Went into hiding. Disappeared. Believed dead for so long that they became literature fantasies.

But Billy wasn't there. He wasn't old at all, by vampire standards. He did find it hard to understand how humans could have beaten them,

however. Humans with their deceit and their tricks...

Steve Harrington carried a distinct lack of deceit and trickery. He was such an open book that Billy manifested an immediate fondness for the guy. It was easy to like someone when he held the upper hand...

Billy's his heart, too slow and gentle to be read by modern electronics, beat harder in his chest as he held a blood bag in his hand. Felt the heat of Steve's body on his palm. Given Billy's connections, he had no shortage of blood at his disposal. He fed earlier that evening so his body would carry a rational temperature in case of any skin contact—

That's where humans and vampires differed. The skin. Breaking skin was...some held it on the same pedestal as murder. Humans, for all their terror over blood and infection, were so careless and indifferent about scraped knees, daredevil whims, and their entertainment media glorifying the release of blood from the body.

Billy's fangs ached in his gums while he held the bag, and unconsciously reached for another, laying that warmth across both of his palms and feeling the ensuing pull on his teeth.

He was made for breaking flesh. Another theory of his: vampires being the root of Catholicism. The very nature of denying what a person is built for. The hypocrisy of worshipping and ignoring the sacred body.

Vampires had sex. And vampires bit necks. It was all opinions, beliefs, and arbitrary bullshit... But Billy wore a golden saint around his neck. As much and as often as he'd fought rules or made his own, he enjoyed the sacred. He didn't bite skin after the first experiments of his youth. There was something undeniably wanton, sacred, and delicious, of course. Many vampires did not go without skin contact after the first time, and it landed them in modern trouble. Exposed them to humanity's latest tricks of forensic analysis, chemical violence, and lawsuits.

*Maybe I'm just edging myself*, he teased.

But...as he stood long enough to feel the heat beginning to seep out

of the bags, something in his bones reacted. His fangs extended as if ready to fight.

He was good at keeping his fangs retracted. No sensible person actually goes into a fight with the most important teeth begging to be knocked out.

He didn't want to taste plastic. Despite the fog swirling through his mind and thoughts, he knew that much. Thankfully, these modern bags conveniently came with straws. Ha. Not their intended purpose, but...

He moved without thinking, unclamping the end points and inserting two of the straws inside his mouth. Billy groaned, guttural and full of breath. Comically like a cat's purr, dangerously like a wolf's growl as the taste of blood washed over his palate.

He...wasn't ready. He'd expected Steve's blood to be different, but only mildly so. A personality flavor that would not be altogether special or distinct from anyone else.

Billy began to sink to his bathroom floor, taking the bags with him and clutching them to his chest as if to keep them warm. Keep them from the world.

He did bite the second bag. He did not sink into a mindless thirst; he felt himself reacting to Steve's blood as if it were Billy's first tasting all over again. The first time he tasted life on his tongue—but this life would promise warmth in his fingers for longer. This blood would fuse to his organs and mind, giving him *rest* like other blood couldn't. Billy could feel the difference; how other blood faded as soon as he swallowed, whereas Steve's bred its own warmth. Hot coals in Billy's belly. Not just heat but light blooming behind his eyelids. Energy seeping to the depths of his limbs.

Billy imagined this to be the difference between sugar and fruit for humans, but on an intoxicating scale. He was not content to eat his candy and run through the sugar high. He sat on his floor, eating his strawberries until the box was empty, and his cheeks were stained red, pink flushing his fingertips. He ripped open the bags as if they were tissue paper. Licked the creases of the plastic until he had no



choice but to finally taste the acrid packaging. Not a single drop of red left.

Billy leaned back against his vanity cabinets. Just...lying in it. Languishing in Steve's essence. Billy felt his mild heartbeat in his gums, pulsing through the teeth dimpling his lower lip, all the way down to his groin and his toes.

He knew he'd found a real treasure in Steve Harrington, tucked away in the shadows of suburban Indiana. But as he looked down at the four bags he'd taken—the four bags he'd ripped open and drained dry—he felt the small, gold medallion on his chest more than ever. The metal sat *cold* on his hot, flushed skin. And for a long moment, Billy wondered if he had bitten more than he could swallow.

He could already feel Steve's tendrils in his house. Vampires had their own tricks. Vampires had kept their magic a literary notion for humans to enjoy, but never to use against them. Things like needing permission to enter a house. Humans already had their science. Vampires needed their magic to stay far away.

Regardless of how Steve's blood tasted, Billy and Max needed him in their house. They needed him to *love* this place. Needed him to plant his roots and grow his branches through these walls. Max had her roots, but the rift in their family and the sudden move here made her branches weak. It made their house a blank slate for anyone to walk into.

But Steve. Billy could feel it in his veins. As quaint and naïve as Steve's mind was, Billy knew his strength. Knew it as intimately as his own now. Like a shift in temperature through the air or water, Billy could read the subtle attachment Steve had already begun to sow in his house. The seeds of his room branching to the kitchen, his own life source, and even Max's room.

Billy did not feel the same protection reaching toward his side of the house. Not yet, at least.

That was fine. Because Billy had Steve in his veins. He just...

Had

To

*Behave himself.*

Billy licked his lips, therein stimulating his sensitive fangs. He swallowed thick and wet, thinking of Steve's pretty blue veins and—

Large, whiskey brown and creek green eyes. Glossy hair that smelled like expensive vanilla, amber, and tart, wild roses. A bone structure that gave Steve the classical *ephebos* or *kouros* figure.

More, his honesty. The emotion that packed into those large, doe eyes. The way he held an entourage of women around him, but not in the way Billy had grown accustomed. The women were not shields or pretty costumes for Steve to hide behind.

Billy shoved the bags into the biohazard box and turned on a cold shower. He had much to swallow, and it was a jape unto himself, that Steve's blood kept him warm.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Oh no he found his favorite Capris Sun flavor.

This is very rambling because Billy's having an existential crisis. Also, *ephebos* and *kouros* are words used to describe the genre that is young men in ancient Greek sculpture art. *Ephebos* usually refers to teenagers (who were considered adults back then) but my research shows that *kouros* is just a modern term for the same thing??? So ignore the age connotation of those words lol Steve is a great big man and Billy's thirsty for that MEAT.

\*ahem\*

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### **Author's Note:**

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